

Transforming The English Language Program at Asia University: A Backward Glance

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Transforming an academic program is difficult because of the degree of compartmentalization that is characteristic of academic institutions. There are the interests of individual professors, the disciplinary areas, the approved courses, the established routines, the long-prepared lessons and lectures, the politics of protecting academic turf, and the protection of budgets. While universities seem liberal in outlook because of their emphasis on teaching cultural values and historical truths, their structure, style, and habits make them resistant to change. If one looks at the changes effected in the English language program at Asia University some ten years ago, there is every evidence that without the convergence of specific external and internal factors, the program would not have been exchanged and would be functioning as it was prior to 1989, actually 1988 which was the year of a pilot program anticipating the changes that were going to be made. In order to reveal the importance of those conditions, I have avoided giving the names of those who worked in bringing about the change. This in no way diminishes their role and contribution, but my purpose is to reveal the necessity of timing and the right conditions.

In September 1983, I was invited to spend six months as exchange professor from Western Washington University to Asia University. The exchange of one faculty had been started in 1981 because of the interest in Asian Studies shared by two professors, one from each of the two institutions. Their common interest in Asian Studies had inspired the efforts to develop the necessary logistics to have a faculty exchange. There were problems inherent in the exchange program since state institutions do not have the flexibility of private institutions. Asia University provided housing and support services, including the development of a lecture course in English and daily contact with the International Programs Office with a few staff members sufficiently fluent in English. Western Washington University did not have housing to provide, and the faculty member going to Asia University had to make his own house available. Furthermore, there was no equivalent of an International Program Office at Western Washington University. Western students were being sent to Europe and to Spanish speaking countries, but this meant that France, Spain and Mexico were the principal targets of exchanges. The exchange faculty member and family from Asia University were to a great extent on their own. Since the Asia University faculty member was not invited to lecture in Japanese on a regular basis, it was difficult to provide a regular academic routine for the exchange professor from Asia University. No duties were specified for that professor.

The single faculty exchange did lead immediately to a summer program in ESL for ten to fifteen Asia University students. The courses were for six weeks duration, and field trips were developed to add to the program. These courses did not impact either university because of the small numbers and because summer programs for foreign students had not been promoted actively at Western Washington University. In fact in March 1984 when I prepared to return to Western Washington University, there was

a request from the International Programs Office at Asia University that I oversee a summer program in ESL because an Asian Studies professor directing the program had not received tenure and would no longer be with Western. There was also the request that housing for the Asia University exchange faculty be improved since there had developed small annoyances such as inadequate plumbing, the need to care for pets, and the distance from the housing provided to the university. In fact, Asia University had to purchase an auto and have it maintained, whereas the Western professor going to Asia University would always have available the excellent public transportation facilities of Tokyo and the nation. It was also becoming difficult to find a sufficient number of professors from Western willing to go to Asia University. In fact, my six months exchange to Asia University had been arranged at the last minute because there had been no one else available. I could only arrange for six months in exchange, and the exchange professor who followed could stay for only three months. On the other hand, the exchange professor from Asia University was always cleared for a calendar year and was supported by Asia University with a supplementary income to cover the additional expenses of the exchange. In the spring of 1984 Western Washington University's President was invited to Asia University in an effort to inform him of the situation and to help solidify future exchanges. Fortunately this president was committed to programs and exchanges focusing on the Pacific Rim.

From 1983 to 1987 the economic conditions began to change rapidly. As the dollar fell in value in favor of the yen, there was increasing pressure on Japan to assume a more international role. Japan's rise in economic power meant that more students began to consider studying Japanese and examining the culture that was at the basis of a rapidly growing economy. More articles began to appear in popular media, and a book on Japan as the number one economic power for the future added to the view that Japan had to be studied and understood. This was not much different from the sudden rise in publications on and about minorities in the United States when riots and lawsuits challenging discrimination and inequality suddenly increased. Very often for self-interest, there develops an interest in what one had previously been able to ignore. Japanese became a language to be studied, and Asian Studies programs began to proliferate. Since China was also suddenly in the news, American institutions began to suggest that a shift from Euro-centric programs would be required. The operative term was globalization. The Japanese Ministry of Education suggested that foreign enrollments in Japanese universities should increase from some thirty thousand to one hundred thousand by the year 2000. A few American universities began to accept offers to establish a campus in a prefecture of Japan, usually at the invitation of the mayor and other local officials. The seeming profitability of such a venture attracted some colleges and community colleges, without adequate planning to say the least. Many of these ventures failed, or were phased out quickly.

English was proclaimed as the new lingua franca. ESL programs began to multiply in American universities, but in most cases as remedial programs for foreign students and immigrants. The growing emphasis on English as a second language stemmed from more than one source. There was, of course, the prevailing view that English would be the second language after the national language in all countries involved in the creation

of a global economy. The Peace Corps had assumed the teaching of English as one of its overseas missions. The influx of immigrants to the United States had established a need to teach English in the elementary schools. The importance of American business and economic theory and practices had brought more foreign university-level students into the United States. A few Japanese universities purchased campus sites in the United States for the purpose of having their students studying English in the United States. Both Japan and the United States were faced with the growing importance of the English language. For Japan as a major economic power, there was the need to learn English in order to play its role alongside the other major competitor. Japan was being viewed as closed and insular. There were charges that Japanese universities had almost no foreign faculty, and that the professors teaching English, with few exceptions, were not fluent in English. The very success of Japan's economy meant that the number of articles and books on Japan published in English greatly increased.

In the United States the success of the American economy lent prestige to American English. In previous years British English had been viewed as the English to be learned and studied. Japanese students seriously interested in English had gone in previous years to London. British English was viewed as the language for the cultivated. However, as globalization became the operative term, American English came to be viewed as a more democratic and practical language, a business language rather than a cultural one. The Japanese ministry of Education, through its JET Program (English Teaching in Japan), began recruiting American university graduates to help instruct in the junior high and secondary schools in Japan. American university students and qualified ESL teachers found increasing opportunities to teach American English throughout the world, but especially in the Middle East and in Asian countries. China, Korea and Japan began recruiting ESL instructors in large numbers.

In 1987 Asia University appointed a new president. This was not a president selected from the inside, meaning that he was not an alumnus of Asia University, nor was he a professor or administrator at Asia University. The new president was a person who was fluent in at least three languages, English, Chinese, and Japanese, who had been an exchange professor to Princeton University, and who was widely traveled. Furthermore, he was very well-known and well-respected in academic circles. Because of the emphasis placed on internationalization, certain Japanese universities had for the first time began to appoint as presidents scholars with an international reputation. Asia University had began as an average private university after World War II, with the objective of bringing students from other Asian countries to study in Japan. Since there were projections that enrollments would begin to fall in the coming years, the usual procedures for selecting a new president had to be bypassed. The rising importance of English as a language, the role of Japan as an economic power, the demands to make Japan less insular, and the emphasis on internationalization and globalization all combined to pressure Asia University into selecting a leader who could bring reforms and remake Asia University into one which

could meet the new demands. The new president had to be a catalyst if Asia University was to compete for the decreasing number of eighteen year olds.

During the years between 1983 and 1987 there had been mention of possibly sending two hundred students to Western Washington University for the study of English. Nothing followed until Asia University had appointed its new president. In late 1987 there developed very suddenly discussion about sending several hundred students from Asia University to the United States. In the spring of 1988 I was asked to help select some universities which would be willing to accept students from Asia University and develop a special program for them. We agreed on west coast schools, and phone calls were made to those universities which by location and size would be able to handle a specific number of students. Details were at first scarce, but as more information became available, the scope of the program became clearer. It was important to find universities which were near large cities like Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles in order that flight schedules could be easily arranged. At the same time these universities had to be at a sufficient distance from large cities so that the safety and security of the Asia University students could be assured. These universities had to be of a sufficient size to permit Asia University students to blend in and not stand out. The community surrounding the university was important since these students were to experience a more standard American life rather than the complexities of urban life. Many universities were interested because accepting Asia University students into a specially created program not connected to the regular curriculum would provide new funding and added use of dormitories and food facilities. Some immediately saw the economic benefits which would derive from having one or two hundred Japanese students living in the community, particularly since Japanese tourists were being labeled as the top spenders among all tourists.

The universities which met the preliminary criteria were visited and categorized as possible, or were eliminated. Certain universities had ESL programs which were strictly defined and could not be changed. Specifically, there were programs that insisted upon a ten student to one instructor ratio, which meant that the cost of instruction would be prohibitive. Other programs could not see developing an English program that did not emphasize improvement of TOEFL® Test scores, nor were they willing to accept Asia University students whose TOEFL® Test scores fell below 450. Asia University needed a program that would accommodate not only students whose scores were near or above the 500 level but also those who fell into the 300 level. Some program directors felt that students with high TOEFL® Test scores had to attend the regular university program since, by their TOEFL® Test scores, they qualified. In other words few programs seemed willing or able to develop an entirely new type of program. As time passed, it became clear that Western Washington University had to be one of the universities desired because of the ties which had been established through the faculty exchange and the summer program. As the number of students projected rose from two hundred to five hundred, and even higher, it became clear that three additional universities would be needed. Eastern Washington, Central Washington, Western Washington and Oregon State University were all located in small communities, and students from Asia University could be easily funneled

through SEATAC and Portland airports. Close working agreements were possible because of their proximity to each other, and they shared fairly similar rules on dormitory and food facilities. From Asia University's point of view, the Pacific Northwest was viewed as attractive, safe and friendly.

The new program and its acronym AUAP were established in a three day meeting held in Seattle in the summer of 1988. A student to teacher ratio of twenty-five to one, a five months program with courses in physical education, American history, environmental sciences, and basic English, along with rules regarding travel, field trips, chaperons, and suspensions, were all part of the agreement. It was accepted that a pilot program of sixty students would begin in the fall of 1988 and that in spring of 1989 some seven hundred students would be distributed among the three campuses. Most important these students were to receive credit at Asia University since the period of study at an American university would become a part of their second year of study. The dispatch with which all of this was accomplished was surprising. Even as the pilot program was under way, Central Washington had still not made the decision internally that it would participate since it had ties with another university in Japan. Even with this delay, it was assumed that in the spring of 1989 over seven hundred students would be divided among the three Washington universities and Oregon State University. The AUAP would become a reality. What drove the development was the assumption that internationalization and globalization had become the principal context for education in the coming decade.

At the same time that AUAP was being established, discussion had begun as to a total revamping of the first year English program at Asia University. The existing program had been a traditional one, with little emphasis on spoken English. Professors lectured in Japanese and stressed grammar and syntax. Many classes were taught by instructors from other universities who could manage an additional course or two at Asia University. If the entire sophomore class was to study at the four universities, the Freshman English Program at Asia University had to be transformed as well in order to prepare them for study in the United States. Very quickly, the President of Asia University contracted with the American Cultural Exchange in Seattle to provide native speakers of English and to change the method of teaching English at Asia University. Unfortunately the group developing the AUAP were not a part of this parallel development. The American Cultural Exchange was exemplary of new efforts in the United States to select, train, and prepare teachers for positions teaching English abroad.

The AUAP was primarily in the hands of those selected to run the programs at the respective Washington universities. With the pilot program as a resource, a number of problems which surface were quickly resolved, for example that of having an Asia University professor accompanying each group and staying with them on the Washington campus for five months. Since it was difficult to provide professors fluent in English, these chaperons were not able to fully participate in program development. Moreover, for some of the Asia University professors, this was their first trip to the United States. It became necessary to eliminate chaperons and

develop different methods of controlling behavior, travel, and participation. The budgets were adjusted to include American student interns, and rules were more strictly defined with regard to behavior. However, it was clear that sending any student back to Japan would create considerable difficulty for Asia University. The conditions of international education began to become clearer. It was evident that a major scandal or the death of a student under ambiguous circumstances would bring an early end to the new program.

The Freshman English Program was almost completely in the hands of the ACE. The organization recruited and selected twenty three instructors, established the courses, and imposed the methodology. In a short time the alienation between the regular Asia University English professors and the instructors hired by ACE became pronounced. The instructors hired by ACE were informed that they were really working for ACE and not for Asia University. Given ACE's interest in establishing similar programs at other universities in Japan, their policies seemed logical enough, but the view of ownership of the program raised immediate problems of control and development. The difficulty was that this approach meant that Asia University could not exercise any significant control over the Freshman English Program and the native speakers hired as instructors. No training of the Asia University English staff to permit them to take over recruiting and evaluation could ever take place. Even more important, coordinating the first and second year English programs was made difficult. It was not surprising, then, that the level of annoyances and problems eventually necessitated changes. It became crucial to name a coordinator who understood that responsibility for the program belonged to Asia University. Therefore, the regular English faculty was brought back in to play a greater role in recruiting and selection, and the newly named coordinator and instructors were selected by Asia University's committees. The four American universities were asked to play a role in recruiting and selection in order to unify the two programs. Over a three year period from 1992 to 1995, changes were effected, and the Freshman English program was stabilized.

Clearly, the process of development and implementation of the two new English language programs revealed major problems in using an instructional staff of only native speakers. For example, given the lack of fluency in spoken English on the part of Asia University's English instructors, it was difficult for them to serve as evaluators and co-instructors. It meant that the assignment of roles and obligations had to be considered in terms of the complexities of utilizing native speakers, maintaining control, and continuing the development of a totally new program without the rise of animosity and separation of the two groups. What kept the program on course and, to a large extent still does so, remain those new forces and conditions which made the transformation of the program necessary. Otherwise, the difficulties could not have endured and corrected. Suffice it to say, some of those problems still remain.

To summarize, the position being taken here is that the transformation of the English Language Program at Asia University from a traditional grammar and translation program taught by Asia University professors to a four skills program taught by

native speakers recruited from the United States, Canada, England, and Ireland was primarily the result of new forces and conditions which forced the change, among which were:

1. The rise of Japan to an economic superpower status, thereby forcing new obligations on Japan's universities to accept more foreign students and instructors.
2. The ensuing criticism of Japanese teaching methods in English.
3. The rise of the yen against the dollar which permitted sending over seven hundred students to three Washington universities and to one Oregon university.
4. The prediction that an enrollment drop would occur in the 1990s and that universities in Japan which could not compete would be forced to close.
5. The atmosphere of internationalization and globalization, and the view that Pacific Rim was crucial to the American economy.
6. The acceptance of American English as the emerging lingua franca.
7. The selection by Asia University of a new president who was expected to change the direction of the university, and as well the selection a few years prior of a new president at Western Washington University who was committed to internationalization.
8. The establishing of ties on a limited basis in the early 1980s between Asia University and Western Washington University.

It is to be noted that with the economic recession in Japan and throughout Asia in the past two years, the study of English by Japanese students has declined, and the Ministry of Education which at one time hoped to have one hundred thousand foreign students studying in Japan has not pushed that goal. In fact, foreign student enrollments have fallen in recent years, and the Japanese society and culture have lost a bit of their earlier mystique. The change in the dollar/yen ratio in favor of the dollar has raised the cost of the program to Asia University's students, and at the same time has reduced the salaries of native speakers hired to be instructors. In fact, Asia University's programs in English after a period of ten years may not be as successful as they once were, particularly as there had been a reaction to the large scale of sudden changes which took place during the span of ten years. The winds of change that blew doors open have begun to subside, but it is clear that enormous progress has been made and that the experience has left Asia University in a better position to meet the next shift in forces and conditions.